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Oral History Interview with Hazel Singmaster Jens
November, 1995
Interviewer: Evelyn McClure for the Western Sonoma County Historical Society

EM: Hazel for the record would you give me your full name?

HJ: Hazel Lorraine Jens

EM: Were you named after anybody in your family?

HJ: No

EM: Where were you born?

HJ: Santa Rosa (E: At home?), No in a maternity home.

EM: What is your family nationality?

HJ: English and German

EM: Where did you live as a child?

HJ: Right over here about 2 miles on Jeanette Avenue. (E: In Graton?) Yes.

EM: Can you remember or tell me what Graton was like when you were a young girl?

HJ: Oh dear, well it isn't like it is now and it wasn't like it was a few years ago.

EM: What year was that? You were born in?

H: 1918. We didn't move out here until.. when I was real small we lived on DuFranc Avenue in Sebastopol, but I don't remember much of that.

E: How long did you live in Sebastopol?

H: I think we moved out of there when I was about five. Moved out here (Graton) It was a home town, everybody knew everybody else. We used to laugh, we didn't have a telephone but if we did something wrong our parents knew about it before we got home.

E: How many people lived in Graton then?

H: Oh I have no idea. We had a 3 room school.

E: Did you have one teacher or several teachers?

H: We had four teachers. We had a kindergarten, first grade teacher then we had one for the second and third and one for the third, fourth and fifth and the principal taught the upper grades.

E: What did you look like (as a child)?

H: Much like I do now only not as fat. No I had red hair and I was always chunky.

E: Is there a lot of red hair in your family?

H: My mother was carrot red.

E: What was your personality like as a young girl?

H: Oh dear me, well I beat up a boy.

E: You were a feisty person?

H: I still don't take anything off anybody. Yeah and Mrs. Lamp (sp?) came out and she took me off him and said "Hazel that's no way for a lady to act" I had him down just really pounding him.

E: Can you think of any other stories like that to show your personality? Things you did?

H: Well we were always starting a club and I was usually one of the officers that type of thing. I didn't go much for sports. Read a lot, was good in art. That's about it.

E: Did you have a nickname?

H: Red

E: Naturally because of your hair. And where did you go to school?

H: Went to Oak Grove School for eight years, Analy for 4 years and went to the Redwood Empire Beauty College in Santa Rosa.

E: Did you have a favorite teacher?

H: Yes her name was Mrs. Buffert (sp?)

E: Was that in grade school?

H: Yes, high school I didn't have any favorites. I had a lot that I didn't like none that I really loved in high school. I had a Miss. Lycine (sp?) that I couldn't stand, neither did anyone else. High school was so much different than grammar school that we still kind of stayed together. My class in high school was very, what do I want to say. (E: You went to school with the same people from

grammar school to high school?) Yes. Now the class before me she went to (a friend of mine) went to Sebastopol Grammar school and Analy and their group was very close all through. They are still having reunions and we don't. We had one reunion but it was the Oak Grove kids got together and that was fun.

E: What year was that?

H: When we got together, let's see. One of the gals came down from Canada and.... five or six years ago and we had a get together at Maxine Payne's.

E: That's a long time to see people from grade school? Did you have chores or did you work as a child?

H: We had chores around. Mother worked in the summer so we had the housework to do, my sister and I. And we had to prepare the food for dinner but we never could cook it because we had a three burner kerosene stove and mother refused to let us light it.

E: Did you have a ranch? Were you on a ranch?

H: We had 3 acres. We had a cow, a garden, chickens.

E: What kind of ideals do you think your parents tried to pass on or teach you? Some way to live your life, did they tell you?

H: No. They stressed honesty and to give an extra inch, give instead of taking it and that's about. They didn't say I had to grow up and do thus and so it was just to be honest you know that type of thing. I guess morals.

E: Did you have any thoughts about what you wanted to do when you grew up?

H: I wanted to be a nurse. When I got in high school I was ..couldn't take the Latin and all the things I had to have for college prep..didn't fit with me and I didn't have time to study. So I got through high school and always was doing hair. I cut my dad's hair for years and I did my mother's, of course my mother's hair was easy to do just comb it down and push it. But mom says well why don't you go to beauty school so I went to beauty school and I've been doing it since 1937.

E: Did you work at a regular beauty salon in Sebastopol?

H: Yes I worked at the Analy Beauty Shop in Sebastopol. I worked for every shop in Sebastopol because after I had my first youngster I quit steady work and I would fill in vacations for the other girls cause everybody knew me and I could step in any shop and take over their customers.

E: Did they have a number of Beauty Shops in Sebastopol?

H: Yes. We didn't have any out here but we had Analy, Hattie's, and there was one other I can't remember ..Flora..not Flora but the Hallers (sp?) took it over. We had three shops in Sebastopol.

E: Did you give people permanents. I know my mother had them with these horrible machines. How did you give a permanent in the early days?

H: Well when I..we had the spiral permanents when I started. That was still a machine. You pulled down these long and a cyclinder went over the rod and then we went to the krogonol (sp?) wrap which was like your coldwaves now and that was a machine or machineless which was a chemical pad you wet and put on the hair (E: with a curler or something) H: It was rolled up real tight and you gave it an extra, like a screw driver, you tightened it up and it was torture.

E: It looked like it

H: Especially if you had one hair out if it was part (?) it didn't hurt so bad. But then the cold wave came in and that was...I did Marcels, paper curls, the iron where you heated it on a stove, we had no electric irons.

E: You've seen a revolution in hair care haven't you?

H:Uh Huh

E: What were your wages when you first started?

H: Eight dollars a week.

E: That sound's pretty good. That was in the 40's or 30's.

H: I graduated in 1936. That was in 1937 I got eight dollars a week. And she got hurt (Mamie Hall) got hurt and I had to take over the shop. Here I had been out of school just a few months and I was , God, you run it you know. So after I'd done that awhile they raised my wages to $16 a week and boy I was really making money. You got $2.50 for a permanent and the highest price was $5.00. Now I guess the cheapest is about $50.

E: When did you first meet your husband. Now you've been married several times..

H: Which one? E: Your first one

H: My first one, we met in grammar school.

E: When did you get married?

H: Dad said you finish. We started going together when I started high school and my Dad insisted I finish high school and get a profession which was good

because Ernie and I were married 13-1/2 years when he dropped dead and left me with two kids. He died at Ives Park playing baseball in 1950.

E: This is Ernie Baker?

H: Yeah, he worked for the County. He spent two years in the Pacific. Those are the worst two years I've ever put in.

E: In World War II?

H: World War II. Absolute worst two years bar nothing.

E: Why was that hard for you?

H: Every time the phone rang. My God is this it. Every time the mail carrier came. What they gonna..I mean it was.. nobody knows until they've gone through it. And I only had the one child then and he was in here listening to the radio. I had the shop going. He came out and said Momma some cowboy or something by the name of Ernie died. It was Ernie Pyle, commentator and he got commentator.. he knew his dad was named Ernie but you know that was the tension we lived under for two whole years. Then after I lost him I married a man I'd known for 17 years and it was quite an experience. I left him after 3-1/2 years I still had this (home) so I moved back home and I was here then for 3 years when I met John Hayes and he'd come up to the front door and talk and I thought, yeah. Everybody'd come in and say you own your own home? Yeah I own my own home. He never asked me that question. And I was going to the Church of Christ at the time and so was he and his family and I knew his boy and one of his daughters before I met him. So that's where he had 'em, he already knew I owned my own home and he never asked it. We eventually got married and had Johnnie and he was 2-1/2 when John died. So there I was left again with a family to raise. But I had the shop and mother was close by she could, she helped out. We used to say John used to babysit Grannie. I made out fine, never had to go on welfare. Now they are all grown and Bill and I met square dancing and we're married 27 years Thanksgiving Day. I've covered a lot of territory.

E: Was there something in the personality of these men that attracted you to them or were they all different people?

H: All different

E: What were some of their qualities? That attracted you?

H: Everyone was honest except the second one. I think I was kind of on a rebound with the second one. I knew he'd help me raise my children and that whole line of bull. And I had known his wife and his family and liked them. He was fine until we were married then everything changed. They were all honest hard working men none of them drank to excess which I wouldn't have tolerated.

E: What did your husbands do for a living?

H: My first husband worked for the county - roadwork. Pete was self employed. John was a rancher. He worked on ranches, on dairys. We went to Nevada and worked on a big ranch up there. Bill was in real estate.

E: What are your children like. Do they have some of your personality traits do you think?

H: I think that's why my first, oldest son and I don't get along too well, we're too much alike. And my youngest son is like his dad. When they made John Hayes they threw away the mold. Easy going as long as you didn't step too hard. He wasn't wishy-washy but he was kind. Kids would ...he loved kids. So that was about.. then I have an adopted daughter. She was a Baker, my first husband's niece and we adopted her and now she takes care of me. She's right there. She took Bill and I to Hawaii a year ago in October and paid every bit of the expenses and she wants me to go to Europe with her this next September but I can't..it's out of the question.

E: Too hard to travel?

H: Well she'd take a wheel chair for me but Bill is not too well and I just can't take that money and go that's all there is to it. She said oh we'll have so much fun. I said I know but ..

E: What activities do you enjoy doing now?

H: I sew a lot. I paint.

E: Oh those are your paintings, how nice.

H: There's my sewing, I'm making, doing buttonholes for my daughter-in-law and making shirts for the kid's Christmas. And what else. I like to cook.

E: Of course you're involved with the Graton Community Club?

H: Um hum. E: What things do you do with them? H: I sew. I just hemmed 20 dish towles for them. And I'm on the board so I have responsibilities there. Right now I'm involved in the Graton sewer, boy that's a mess.

E: Have you done travelling? In your younger years?

H: Not much no, my very first camping trip was before I started grammar school. The only type of vehicle we had when I was growing up was a truck cause Dad with in the apple business. Grandma and Grandpa had a Buick Roadster and they went with us and we went to what was then called Lane's Redwood Flats. It's up above Wyeott what's the place called now. Richardson's Grove. Along in there. It took us two days to make the trip. We had a flat tire along the way. We stayed all night the first night in Ukiah and a peacock screamed in the middle of

the night and scared the living daylights out of me. Never heard one before. We picked huckleberries and I shut my sister in a box and grandma rescued her she was almost smothered. That was my first camping trip. Then years later Laura Griffith Huffine (sp?) She was a local botanist, astronomer, naturalist you name it, she was a very interesting lady. She couldn't hear so she and mother became acquainted and she said to mom "if you make the arrangements for a trip to Yosemite, I will pay the expenses" So that's what mom did. I was between the 7th and 8th grade. We went to Yosemite for eleven days and we hiked to the top of Glacier Point. We did a lot of ..happy isles..side trips. We up to Vernal and Nevada Falls.

E: Were there very many other people in the park?

H: No we camped right on the..camp, camped. It was nice. The next trip we took with her was up to Mt. Lassen and Crater Lake and hiked to the top of Mt. Lassen. I don't know if it was before that or after we hiked to the top of Mt. St. Helena right here. A lot of our trips were little short trips over to the coast and that type of thing. She took us on those two trips then after dad passed away we took a trip to Yosemite. Mom and Ernie the kids and I and we camped. There was none of this camping with a motorhome. The next year, 1950 we took a trip to Tuoluomne Meadows. We were going to go back the next year and we got home the first part of July and Ernie died the end part of July. We got home just in time that he didn't pass away up there. I didn't do too much travelling after that because ...I made one more trip to Tuoluomne Meadows with my sister-in-law after that and my brother-in-law then after that I got married. We took a trip back to Wisconsin. He wanted to fly. I said I wanted to drive because I'd never been so we drove the southern route and came back through Yellowstone. We saw a lot of the country that way. And I went ..took a trip to Alaska when John was five and he was born in 1959. He and I went to Ketchican on a plane then we got on the ferry boat and went to Haynes. Met an old friend there stayed a week with her and came home the same way. That was a wonderful trip.

E: Well we've covered your personal history, now can we talk about your family? Could you give me the names of your mother and father?

H: Alzuma Jennie Wirts Singmaster. My father was Jacob Erroll Singmaster. Like Erroll Flynn. Erroll Flynn was named after him (just kidding)

E: What are their birthdates? H: Oh dear, dad was born on April 3rd, mother Jan. 11th. And you want the dates. I think I have that in here (family album) this yellow paper in here. that's a copy of the passport of the Wirts family. (a big document) Mother born in 1893, Forest Home, Amador County. Dad born .... I went through this the other night. i have the history clear back.

E: you've done a genealogy study?

H: Yes, my nephew that lives out there in the motor home is a nut on genealogy. That's grandparents. Jacob was born 1881. In Iowa.

E: When did you mother come to this area?

H: I had that down here too. I figured you'd ask me that. Well the Singmasters came in 1881.... 1870. Aunt Annie was 11 years old when she came to California and she was born in 1870. So that makes it 1881.

E: So your father came here as a baby?

H: As a very small youngster, yes. And mother was a little older. They were still in California. We got this from the census taker. 1910 township. Alzuma was 16. I know they were here before that. Then they moved from Amador county in 1910 so sometime between 1900 and 1910 the family moved from Amador county.

E: What were your parents like?

H: My parents. Very much family. Dad had no interest but mom, me and my sister, that was it. Now my first husband he had me and my son but then he had hunting and fishing too. Dad had no interests but us. I guess it was he was orphaned quite young and family really meant a lot to him.

E: What did he do for a living?

H: He was an apple man. He built the first commercial dryer in Graton. Before that they had the little family dryers on each ranch. And then he worked for Frei Brothers when they had the apple orchard on the Frei ranch and there's pictures of him in the apple business. He was apples. That's what he did.

E: Did he have his own orchard?

H: Not a big one. We had little ones. (E: But he did a lot of work for other people?) And then he did a lot of pruning of young trees because the last orchard Frei Brothers put in Dad had retired and they asked him to do the first pruning on the trees, because he knew how to get them started. He almost got lynched in Sebastopol one time. (E: What happened?) They picked apples too green and still do and they packed them in the packing boxes then they put the lid on and the juice would fly. Hauled some apples to Stockton, they said we couldn't haul ripe fruit. Well Dad and Mom place packed in one way lugs and he hauled them to Stockton, ripe Gravensteins and he found a box of the Sebastopol Apple Growers Union and they were square and yellow and all shriveled up. He opened them up at the corner, there used to be a fountain at the corner there at the stoplight right in the middle of town and he opened it up there and everybody of course gathered around and said this is why your market is like it is and somebody came and said "Sing" they called him Sing, you better get out of here they're coming to tar and feather you.

E: The apple growers wanted to pack 'em their way?

H: And they still do. the minute the apples start falling "we got to get them picked" Those apples are no good. (E: They're concerned because the Grav apple

doesn't last that long?) Right, but they're no good. Well you never could tell them anything. But that was Dad, he was very adamant about. people owned him money that he owed and he would never.. "well, they can't afford it" but they could afford a new car that kind of stuff. that was the kind of man Dad was. Mom wasn't quite that easy going. Course she was a housewife, a homemaker, you don't wife a house. and Mom was always interested in Campfire, the Graton Club, she was a charter member. She and my grandmother both.

E: When did the Club start?

H: 1914 mother was very self well educated. In those years if you finished grammar school you were lucky and Dad never finished grammar school he was smart too. He could build and lay out rafters, do it all on paper, cut them and take them and put them up. but mother wrote a little poetry, wrote a lot of history. She did most of this.

E: She wrote two really main histories of Graton and the Community Club didn't she?

H: The First Fifty Years of the Community Club has a lot of Graton history in it not just the Club and this of course is our family history that she and my niece put together, all this stuff. A pictorial.. and here's our family tree. We go back further than that.

E: Now this is only her side of the family?

H: This is her side of the family, the Wirts side.

E: Let's talk about the Wirts for a minute. This would be your grandfather on your mother's side?

H: Here is my grandfather and grandmother.

E: Your grandfather was George Denna Wirts.

H: He was born in Ohio, I don't know the year and he came across the plains when he was five. And this is his father and his mother was Mary. And she was pregnant with Louise - Aunt Lou here, they had a kid every nine months and nine minutes and this would be great-great grandparents and it goes back. and that's the family picture.

E: This is your grandmother?

H: Margaret Ann Middleton. She was born in Shingle Springs, CA. And Mom was born in Amador County.

E: And your mother had, let's see, one, two...seven children in the family.

H: There was more than that. A set of twins, George Cooper he didn't live very long. Frank and Francis and Aunt El and Aunt Del (Della?/Mrs. Alfred Hallberg) and Mom and George Bruce passed away, you can see, and uncle John grew to be an adult. Those are her brothers and sisters. We had a hard time finding anything about the Middleton's ..Thomas Middleton. He passed away not too long after he came here and married Sara Cooper. and In 9 years they had five children. He was killed and she married Samuel Hill. They had no children. Her parents were Margaret Grant and George Cooper. She is supposed to be related to President Grant.

E: Your mother has an unusual first name, how did she get that?

H: That's written in here and I thought it's so cute. it seems that some relative of grandma's had a child back east. The baby was born and the Indian chief came to see the baby and he named her Alzuma which meant white rose. She didn't live, she passed away so this relative wrote to grandma when she found out she was going to have a baby and if it was a girl would she name it Alzuma after the baby they'd lost. And they would leave ..that baby would inherit whatever their child would have inherited. Well...turned out to be nothing. and Mom carried that name all those years. You can picture Mom when she was red haired. I mean carrotty red and freckles.

E: Did she have a nickname?

H: Zooky. then as she got older she was Zoney, Aunt Zoney. Later she became Granny to everybody. But Zooky was her name in school. One of the men she went to school with. ..of course she went to Oak Grove school also. Burt Bowers was later the truant officer they went to school together and no matter where she was "hi there Zooky" That's how she got her name. (Per Gloria Roberts she was called Alma by friends in the community)

E: Did your mother ever tell you any stories about what it was like when she was a girl?

H: Not too much. They had a pretty rough life. They lived up there in the gold country. She said that one time grandma took them for a hike and they picked wild berries to make a picnic and she said she knows now it was because there was nothing else to eat. It was very hard times.

E: Were they mining?

H: Yep. My grandfather was a miner. He ran the what do you call them, monitors..placer mining. And I have pictures somewhere, I guess they are upstairs, of him running the monitor. So, you know, it was..then they, she inherited some money when grandma's mother married Sam Hill they homesteaded some property in Amador County and then they sold that and moved to Santa Rosa Valley in Ventura. They owned that whole valley, put stock on it. Well when she died the property was divided up to the children and they got quite a bit of money. They sold their piece right away and it lasted just that

long. So they did pretty well, after all the kids were grown and everything but it was rough. Grandpa was a hard worker but he didn't..here they are on a ranch up in Vacaville. Here's grandpa. I don't know who those two are. You didn't need much money in those years.

E: If you had a farm you could raise some food and that sort of thing.
Do you know which of your family, way way back first came to the United States? They' ve been here for a number of generations haven't they?

H: They have. On the Wirts side, he came in, he left Germany in 1785. George Wirts. Grandpa's grandfather. And the Singmaster family came here earlier than that. I need Eric (Hazel's nephew) he knows all this stuff by heart. Here's about her name.

E: I see here that Wirts was spelled Weurtz so they did change their name as they came over.

H: And it's been changed since too.

E: The Middleton's came to America in 1826 through 1856 (it said on a paper)

H: That's Mom's side. Now the Singmaster side they came to Pennsylvania . Most of the people. Here's a tanner. They were farmers and Momma's side of the family were farmers, seamstresses and that sort of thing. The Singmaster side of the family. Samuel was born in Iowa he was a tanner. And engaged in conveying sheep from Ohio to Philadelphia. He was sort of in the live stock business and one of the Singmasters raised Percheron horses and had a champion. When did they come to the United States? Well here we go back to 1699. Johan Adam Zangmeister or Zhangmeister (sp?) George Friederick Zangmeister.

E: Does it say where they came from?

H: Yes Pflaz, Germany. Was where he was baptised. Emigrated to America aboard the ship Patience, landed in Philadelphia on 9th of Sept. 1749. settled near Collegeville (?) Burks County, Philadelphia. George Z. served in a military company, Milford (?) township, Bucks County. George Frederick had seven kids. He was a tanner. So they came here in 1749. How much further back do you want to go. I don't go any further back than that.

E: That's fine.

End of tape - interview complete on side A